

Leadership Style and National Culture on Restaurant Employees' Affective Commitment

Yong Joong Kim

School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration

Oklahoma State University

and

Murat Hancer

School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration

Oklahoma State University

ABSTRACT

The topics of leadership and culture have attracted substantial interest from both academics and practitioners. This study examines the effects of leadership styles and national culture on affective commitment in samples of the restaurant employees in US. The findings support the primary assumption of this study: restaurant employees' affective commitment is related to the leadership styles of their supervisors. Interestingly, both participative leadership style and supportive leadership style have effects on affective commitment but instrumental leadership style does not. Finally, in order to increase the employees' affective commitment, it is recommended for managers to employ supportive leadership style toward employees of different national cultures. A participative leadership style is more effective when a manager is familiar with his or her employees' national culture.

Keywords: leadership, leadership style; national culture; restaurant industry.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership skills are important for the hospitality industry because the hospitality industry has a dynamic environment, a service orientation, and a labor-intensive nature (Gillet & Morda, 2003). Indeed, leadership style has a remarkable influence on employees' behavior in the customer service industry (Ahmed & Parasuraman, 1994; Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009), where leadership style focus on the behavior of the leaders rather than focusing on identifying personal characteristics of leaders (Flaherty, Mowen, Brown, & Marshall, 2009). For instance, transformational leadership style improves employee dedication, social behavior, role clarity, and satisfaction (Gill & Mathur, 2007). However, although different leadership styles can influence employees, we know little about the most appropriate leadership style in the restaurant industry.

Testa (2007, p. 469) has pointed out "shifts in demographics over the past decade combined with increasing internationalization are creating significant challenges for hospitality organizations." Weaver, Wilborn, McCleary, and Lekagul (2007) stated that managing a multicultural workforce continues to be a pressing concern for hospitality organizations. Due to the increasing degree of culturally diverse workforces, leaders should understand the importance

of the values and actions of people working within multi-cultural organizations (Zander & Romani, 2004). Consequently, it is necessary to get a specific style of leaders who can lead employees from different cultures (Javidan & Carl, 2004). For example, Newman and Nollen (1996) found that participative leadership style improved profitability of work units in countries with relatively low power distance culture but did not affect profitability in high power distance ones. As this example showed, there are positive relationships between leadership and organizational performance and changes in leadership can improve organizational performance. Finally, the effectiveness of a leader is a main determinant of the success or failure of an organization (Fiedler, 1996) and a specific leadership style enables individuals and groups' success in their organization (Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009).

The thesis of this research is that multinational restaurants need to adapt their leadership styles to the national cultures in which they operate in order to achieve high employee performance: employees' affective commitment. Affective commitment is defined as an employee's sense of belonging and identification that increases his or her involvement in the organization's activities and their desire to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

There are few studies to link leadership styles, employees' cultural orientation, and employees' performance such as affective commitment taking a cross-cultural perspective (Jung & Avolio, 1999). While the links between leadership and performance and between culture and performance have been examined independently, few studies have investigated the association among the three concepts (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000).

The primary purpose of this study is to assess the relative effects of specific leadership styles on employees' affective commitment. This study investigates the extent to which different leadership styles influence non-managerial restaurant employees. In addition, this study examines how employees evaluate their leaders from different national cultures and how cultural similarity influences employees' affective commitment. Finally, the researchers identify the leadership style that is most appropriate for the culturally diverse restaurant industry.

This study makes two main contributions. First, this study contributes to the theoretical literature by explaining the links between the leadership and culture and the impact that such an association might have on affective commitment. This study is one of the few studies in the hospitality literatures to examine the role of different leadership styles in enhancing employee commitment concurrently. Second, few previous studies make specific reference to both leadership and national culture in the restaurant context. Therefore, the results of the study can assist restaurant managers in developing their leadership style with attention to the differences in national culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

Early research of leadership focused on the inherent qualities of individual leaders and this dominant view was the trait approach (Flaherty, Mowen, Brown, & Marshall, 2009;

Worsfold, 1989). The next approach to leadership research changed the perspective to focus on differences in leadership style (Flaherty, Mowen, Brown, & Marshall, 2009). This approach assumed that subordinates would work more effectively for a manager who employs a particular leadership style (Worsfold, 1989). This requires the manager to adopt a leadership style that can influence his or her employees. However, while different leadership styles have the ability to influence employees in differing ways, the identification of the most appropriate leadership style remains vague (Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009).

This study defines leadership as an outcome of the social-cognitive processes that people use to label others and “it involves the behaviors, traits, characteristics and outcomes produced by leaders as these elements are interpreted by followers” (Yan & Hunt, 2005, p50).

Leadership and national culture

It is important to understand employees' culture in organization because an employee's national culture can influence his or her perception of work environment and its components (Hofstede, 1991), in which national culture is defined as the values, beliefs and assumptions learned in early childhood that distinguishes one group of people from another (Hofstede, 1991). Unless leaders are able to perform subordinates' expectations of what leadership behavior ought to be within the particular cultural context, leaders will not be effective (Kuchinke, 1999).

Testa (2002) insisted that national culture has impact on an employee's appraisal of the work environment and on employee-related outcomes. Using a sample of congruent and incongruent leadership dyads from a cruise organization, Testa (2002) found that subordinates within congruent dyads evaluated their leaders significantly higher on consideration behaviors than did subordinates in incongruent dyads. Further, subordinates within congruent dyads reported significantly higher levels of trust and satisfaction with their supervisor than did members within incongruent dyads. Engle and Lord (1997) supported that positive affect will develop among leaders and followers when cultures are similar. Meanwhile, Mwaura, Sutton, and Roberts (1998) found that divergence between national culture and hotel corporate culture caused miscommunication, conflict, and delayed work processes in China where a strong national culture is prevalent. In short, national culture is an important key for employees' understanding of and approach to their work (Newman & Nollen, 1996) because the employees are likely to be willing to perform well if management practices are consistent with their deeply held values, beliefs and assumptions.

Lord, De Vader, and Alliger (1986) stated that leadership styles are consistent within a culture, which implies that they may also vary considerably across cultures. Based on cultural background, an individual may make assumptions about his or her leader in relation to the leader's leadership prototype (Shaw, 1990). Therefore, different leadership styles or leadership prototypes would be expected to occur naturally in societies that have differing cultural profiles (Hofstede, 1993). For example, one might need to take strong decisive action in order to be seen as a leader, whereas in other cultures consultation and a democratic approach may be a prerequisite (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999). An empirical study (Dorfman, Howell, Hibino, Lee, Tate, & Bautista, 1997) showed that directive leadership style had a positive impact on employee outcomes in Taiwan and Mexico among five countries: South

Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Mexico and the United States. Shaw (1990) concluded that the more leadership concepts between foreign managers and relevant attributers in a host country differ, the less the likelihood that cross-cultural leadership will be accepted and effective.

Triandis (1994) suggested that there are different optimal leadership styles for different national culture. For example, in individualist countries, people think that having freedom and challenges in jobs are more important, while in collectivist cultures, people favor security, obedience, duty, and group harmony (Triandis, 1994). Javidan and Carl (2004) insisted that culture is an important variable in defining leadership effectiveness since what may work in one culture may not work in another.

Testa pointed out (2002) that few studies have looked at differences in perceived leadership styles and outcomes when the leader and a follower have the same or different national origins. Furthermore, limited research has examined this topic in the context of the restaurant industry.

Leadership and affective commitment

Organizational commitment is the major determinant of organizational performance (Angle, 1981; Riketta, 2002). Organizational commitment is defined as a situation in which an individual identifies with an organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in order to reach these goals (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979).

According to Herscovitch and Meyer, “it is widely accepted that employee commitment to organizations can take different forms, and that acknowledging these differences enables researchers to make precise predictions about the impact of commitment on behavior” (2002, p. 474). Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualized commitment as a psychological state, or mind-set that increases the likelihood that an employee will maintain membership in an organization. In their three-component model of organizational commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) used the terms: affective commitment (desire to remain), continuance commitment (perceived cost of leaving), and normative commitment (perceived obligation to remain).

This study selected affective organizational commitment because it is the form of commitment that is most likely to reflect employees’ attitudes to the way their organization manages cultural diversity (Leveson, Joiner, & Bakalis, 2009). In addition, because turnover can be costly to restaurants, affective commitment is generally assumed a desirable quality that should be fostered in employees. Somers (1995) found that affective commitment among three components of commitment emerged as the sole predictor of turnover and absenteeism. Further, the results of an empirical study (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989) showed that affective commitment of employees to a food services organization was positively related to their job performance.

Lok and Crawford (2004) claimed that individuals’ levels of commitment to the organization might differ because of their dissimilar personal values, attitude and beliefs that are reflected in different national cultures. For instance, collectivists tend to have a stronger attachment to their organizations and tend to subordinate their individual goals to group goals

(Earley, 1989). Collectivists also typically exhibit high levels of loyalty and commitment to the leader (Jung, Bass, & Sosik, 1995).

Meanwhile, a specific leadership style can influence employees' organizational commitment. For example, Walumbwa and Lawler (2003) found that transformational leaders are able to motivate their followers to become more involved in their work and to show higher levels of organizational commitment. Transformational leadership style emphasizes the importance of subordinating individual needs to group goals, a central feature of collectivist cultures.

It is reasonable to assume that there is a link between leadership and affective commitment and to expect that a specific leadership style can enhance affective commitment among employees from different national cultures.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and data collection

The target population of this study is employees in restaurants in the United States. The restaurant industry was selected because the restaurants in US consist of heterogeneous employees and because restaurants provide many opportunities for managers and employees to interact. According to Clark, Hartline, and Jones (2009, p. 218), "the level of close interaction creates an environment where employee's job actions are likely to be affected by their manager's leadership style." The researchers contacted 53 restaurant owners or managers to explain the research and solicit the managers' support. A database of the names, email addresses and mail addresses of the restaurants had been obtained from a publicly available database purchased by the School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration at Oklahoma State University.

This study selected the same type of high volume independent restaurants listed by annual sales, operating 1 or 2 units, average annual sales 1 million per location, including family, casual and fine dining restaurants only. Twenty-seven restaurant owners agreed to support and assisted our efforts by distributing questionnaire packets on our behalf. Approximately one month later, questionnaire packets, which contain the surveys for employees and postage-paid return envelopes, were mailed to each manager. The restaurants' owners or managers were instructed to distribute the surveys and envelopes to their employees. Approximately two months after the initial mailing, questionnaires were returned directly to the researchers.

The data were collected from June 17, 2010 to September 3, 2010. The researchers received at least one questionnaire from an employee at 27 different restaurants (50.9%). Restaurant managers or owners returned 119 surveys. Out of 119 responses, 13 were eliminated because of an excessive amount of missing data. After elimination, 106 responses (89.1%) were coded and analyzed.

Measurement

This study used a two-part questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire items are largely derived from the literature review and the instrument (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Testa, 2002; Testa, 2009). The first part of the questionnaire comprises demographic questions about the respondent's gender, age, education department type, years in the same restaurant, and years in the restaurant industry. Respondents were also asked where his or her supervisor was born and raised, in order to identify employees and managers with the same country of origin. In the second part, respondents were asked to answer questions related to perceived leadership style and affective commitment using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1, "strongly disagree", to 7, "strongly agree."

The measure of leadership style has been widely used in a variety of literatures and is generally accepted as a good measure of perceptions of leadership style (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Teas, 1981). Affective commitment was measured using the relevant six items from the previous instrument (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Their instrument was principally based on the earlier work: five items from Meyer and Allen's Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) and one item from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979).

Data analysis

All statistical analyses were carried out using the SPSS statistical computer package, Version 17. Frequency analysis was performed to provide profiles of the respondents. Responses to the items measuring perceived leadership style and affective commitment were factor analyzed. The principle axes method of factor extraction was used with varimax rotation. The obtained factor scores were used for subsequent data analysis. Regression analyses were used to examine the extent to which respondents' affective commitment can be predicted from the leadership style and national culture variables.

RESULTS

The respondents for the empirical investigation included a similar distribution of males (50.0%) and females (50.0%) and a broad cross-section of age groups. About two-thirds (77.3%) of respondents had received at least a college degree or had been in college while 22.7% of respondents had attended or graduated from high school. In relation to work experience, 36.8% had worked in the restaurant for one year or less and 44.3% for 2-5 years. Among the 106 respondents, 59.4% reported having the same nationality as their supervisor and 40.6% indicated that they were different.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Characteristics

| Variable | (N = 106) | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | | |
| Male | | 53 | 50.0 |
| Female | | 53 | 50.0 |
| <i>Age</i> | | | |
| 18-20 | | 27 | 25.5 |
| 21-30 | | 53 | 50.0 |
| 31-40 | | 14 | 13.2 |
| 41-50 | | 7 | 6.6 |
| Over 51 | | 5 | 4.7 |
| <i>Education</i> | | | |
| Less than high school | | 5 | 4.7 |
| High school | | 19 | 17.9 |
| College | | 50 | 47.2 |
| Bachelor's degree | | 24 | 22.6 |
| Graduate degree | | 8 | 7.5 |
| <i>Duration of employment</i> | | | |
| 1 year | | 39 | 36.8 |
| 2-5 years | | 47 | 44.3 |
| 6-10 years | | 12 | 11.3 |
| 11-20 years | | 5 | 4.7 |
| Over 21 years | | 3 | 2.8 |
| <i>National culture with supervisor</i> | | | |
| Similar | | 63 | 59.4 |
| Different | | 43 | 40.6 |

Table 2 presents the principal components analysis of the adapted items of Ogbonna and Harris' (2000) measure of leadership style. As expected, this factor analysis yielded three factors that were readily interpreted in terms of the original subscales, which measure participative leadership, supportive leadership, and instrumental leadership. The first items that comprise this solution are geared to the measurement of leadership participation: a non-directive form of role-clarifying behavior, which is gauged by the extent to which leaders allow subordinates to influence decisions, by requesting input and contribution (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). The second factor was most strongly defined by three items derived from the supportive leadership subscales, which account for over 15 % of the variance. According to Ogbonna and Harris (2000), this measure focuses on the degree to which the behavior of a leader can be viewed as sympathetic and considerate of subordinates' needs. Dorfman, et al., (1997) explained that supportive leadership style indicates a concern for the welfare of subordinates, shows warmth, respect, and trust. Items indicating instrumental leadership defined the third factor. This items measure the employees' perceptions of the leader's initiation of structure (Teas, 1981) and the extent to which leaders specify expectations, establish procedures, and allocate tasks (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000).

Table 2
Results of Factor Analysis of Leadership Style

| Factor | Factor loading | Eigen value | Variance explain % |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| FACTOR 1: <i>Participative leadership</i> | | 4.94 | 44.97 |
| My supervisor asks subordinates for their suggestions | .895 | | |
| My supervisor listens to subordinate's advice on which assignments should be made | .859 | | |
| When faced with a problem, my supervisor consults with subordinates | .783 | | |
| Before taking action, my supervisor consults with subordinates | .682 | | |
| Before making decisions, my supervisor considers what her/his subordinates have to say | .611 | | |
| FACTOR 2: <i>Supportive leadership</i> | | 1.72 | 15.61 |
| My supervisor treats all group members as equals | .802 | | |
| My supervisor looks out for the personal welfare of group members | .790 | | |
| My supervisor helps people to make working on their tasks more pleasant | .698 | | |
| FACTOR 3: <i>Instrumental leadership</i> | | 1.38 | 12.56 |
| My supervisor decides what and how things shall be done | .878 | | |
| My supervisor maintains definite standards of performance | .813 | | |
| My supervisor schedules the work to be done | .609 | | |
| Total variance explained | | | 73.15 |

Regression analysis was used to investigate the prediction of affective commitment based on the leadership style and national culture variables. Table 3 reports the results of the multiple regression analysis. When affective commitment is the dependent variable, the difference in the regression coefficients across the two subgroups reflecting similar and different national culture is statistically significant. A statistically significant change in R^2 occurred with the introduction of the culture variable.

Table 3 shows a similar pattern of regression coefficients with positive effects of participative leadership and supportive leadership on affective commitment. However, the instrumental leadership variable was found to have no significant effect on affective commitment. For different national groups, supportive leadership has the most significant effect on affective commitment, followed by participative leadership. Meanwhile, in similar national culture group, participative leadership has a more significant effect than supportive leadership.

Table 3
Results of Regression Analysis

| Factor | Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment | | | |
|---|--|----------------|--|----------------|
| | Different national culture group | | Similar national culture group | |
| | Std. β | t (2-tailed) | Std. β | t (2-tailed) |
| FACTOR 1: <i>Participative leadership</i> | 0.329 | 2.261* | 0.438 | 3.987** |
| FACTOR 2: <i>Supportive leadership</i> | 0.522 | 4.154** | 0.301 | 2.741* |
| FACTOR 3: <i>Instrumental leadership</i> | -0.070 | -0.554 | -0.081 | -0.735 |
| | $F = 8.143^{**}$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.338$ | | $F = 7.985^{**}$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.253$ | |

* $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.001$

CONCLUSION

The findings supports the primary assumption of this study: restaurant employees' affective commitment is related to the leadership styles of their supervisors. Interestingly, both participative leadership style and supportive leadership style have effects on affective commitment but instrumental leadership style does not. Finally, the researchers conclude that supportive leadership is the appropriate leadership style between managers and employees from different national cultures.

The results have practical implications for managing the culturally diverse restaurant in the United States. The different effects that three different leadership styles had on restaurant employees' affective commitment may suggest that restaurants can help their leaders manage culturally diverse groups more effectively by providing training on the differential effects of various leadership styles. On the other hand, one may consider selecting expatriate managers based on how strongly their leadership styles overlap with the leadership style predominantly held among the restaurant employees.

The findings suggest that restaurant managers should be particularly considerate when interacting with employees from a different national culture. For example, managers should be sympathetic and considerate of their subordinates' needs. In contrast, an instrumental leadership style can have a negative effect on employees' affective commitment. Therefore, in order to increase the employees' affective commitment, managers should adopt a supportive leadership style toward employees from a different national culture. A participative leadership style is more effective when a manager is familiar with his or her employees' national culture.

The following limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings of this study. The first limitation to the study is the use of a convenience sample of respondents who decided to participate in the survey. Self-selection could result in a non-representative sampling bias. Second, the relatively small sample size precluded other advanced types of analysis such as multivariate analysis of variance. Additionally, the sample size has limitation on generalizability.

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